

Establishing a study schedule early on will lead to better grades

Counselor's CORNER

Dear Counselor: This is my third semester at UK, and I'm trying to break a bad habit — cramming for tests. The stress and strain is burning me out! I have a vague idea of things I can do to review for exams, but I need help with specific techniques to give me a sense of direction. There has to be a better way than pulling those all-nighters. Any suggestions. Sleepy Sophomore.

Dear Sleepy: Cramming for a test is analogous to taking a drug to feel better. It seems to have a positive short-term effect (i.e., short-term memory recall), but the long-term effects can be very detrimental (i.e., a perpetuation of poor study skills and habits, health problems caused by stress, and lack of true learning).

Many students find it difficult *not* to cram. An important factor to realize is that cramming is a learned habit. Generally, we rely on cramming to compensate for various ineffective habits that we have assimilated, such as poor time management, inefficient study techniques and negative attitudes.

Let's take a look at a few exam review habits that, if utilized, could prove very beneficial.

Time Management. Organization and planning will make that big test seem a little less formidable. Here's a few ways to accomplish it:

- Create an academic calendar with all exam dates marked. This is a crucial first step in formulating a more detailed schedule.

- Start reviewing at least one week

in advance and mark it on your calendar.

- Determine the scope of the testing material and divide it into smaller sections.

- Plan two hours of study for every hour of class. Break up these sessions with short breaks every 30-45 minutes to aide in concentration.

- Use "waking time" during the day to review concepts or items for memory. Don't forget to plan study sessions on weekends to maximize retention.

- Set limits on your review sessions. It forces you to be goal-directed and more productive. Build "flexible time" into your schedule to compensate for more difficult classes.

- Get an early start and plan now for that next exam. This is one proven way to reduce test anxiety.

Study Techniques. Here are a few "tried-and-true" techniques that work, if you use them:

- Find a quiet, convenient study area free from distractions. It is advisable *not* to study at home.

- Review the entire scope of the material to be learned and then break it down into small pieces. Whole-to-part learning aids in retention of material.

- Utilize mnemonic devices, such as rhymes or acronyms, and creative associations to aid the memory process.

- Create practice tests to better synthesize the material and to build confidence. Anticipate probable questions and prepare sample problems to solve.

- Create review tools such as summary sheets or flash cards. Summarize your readings or notes and teach someone else what you have learned. (Sometimes we can learn

best by teaching.)

- Ask your instructor to conduct review sessions before tests.

- Form a study group of four or five people and agree to meet to brainstorm possible test questions and problems. If socializing is kept to a minimum, this is a great way to study for a test.

The Mental Factor. Many students overlook their attitude and motivation as factors related to examine reviews and test-taking. Here are a few tips:

- Formulate *short- and long-term* goals and focus them intensely. This process provides the fuel for your motivation.

- Feeling guilty about the past or worrying about the future "steals" your concentration and attention away from the only thing you can control — the present moment.

- Use positive affirmations and self-talk every day. Attitude comes from expectations. Expect to do great.

- Keep the test in perspective. Don't equate the test score with your self-esteem. "F" is for feedback, not failure.

The chance of obtaining a "profitable return," as well as a few nights of sleep, is dramatically increased as you utilize these techniques.

You may wish to see an academic counselor in the Learning Skills program or consider enrolling in the Master Student Program. This 12-hour non-credit class is designed to help students achieve academic success. It is a great investment in your academic future.

Students who wish to address these issues can come by the UK Counseling and Testing Center, 310 Frazer Hall, or call, 257-8701.